

Summary

In recent years, the Swedish Government has assigned top priority to improving interventions by the community aimed at helping victims of partner violence. The Government decided in March 2008 to construct a physical environment designed to investigate male violence against women. The Karin Project that grew out of the decision involved collaboration by the police and social services at shared facilities wholly dedicated to cases involving victims of partner violence. The Government tasked the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) with the responsibility of evaluating the working methods employed by the Karin Project, as well as the impact they have had on the quality and effectiveness of efforts to support female victims of partner violence.

The assignment also involved examining the extent to which the Karin Project in Malmö differs from other similar programmes throughout Sweden. For that reason, Brå has compared the support services of the Karin Project with the efforts of the Partner Violence Centre (PVC) in Stockholm. Similarly, the police work at the Karin Project has been compared with the Family and Partner Violence (FPV) Section in Västerås. Based on preliminary investigation material, questionnaires, interviews and register data, the evaluation was limited to the activities of Project Karin that help female victims of partner violence.

Karin Project

The Karin Project is conducted at a police station in Malmö that specializes in helping women, men and child victims of violence, threats or sexual abuse by a closely related person. The project also supports children who have witnessed violence, and it can assist people who have been reported to the police. Two criminal investigators and two social workers collaborate closely at the facility. All personnel are experts on partner violence. Both the police and social workers are constantly in touch with other organizations and public authorities. The mission of the Karin Project also involves disseminating knowledge in both national and internatio-

nal forums about partner violence, as well as about the collaboration model that has been developed.

The physical environment, which is integral to the project, is very different from a traditional Swedish police station. The furnishings, textiles and the choice of colour receive special attention. The purpose of the setting is to create a sense of security, comfort and wellbeing, hopefully motivating women to participate in the police investigation. Situating the police and social services in the same premises makes it easier for victims to maintain contact with both of them.

The Karin Project reaches many but has fewer counselling sessions

The routine for the Karin Project is that the police immediately turn over copies of all the reports they receive, along with the contact details of the victims, to the social workers. The social workers get in touch with the women within 24 hours to assess their need for support and help them obtain appropriate protection.

PVC in Stockholm also specializes in supporting female victims of partner violence. PVC also reaches out to victims on the basis of reports received by the police, but the police first ask a woman – though not on a routine basis – whether she wants to receive a phone call. The Västerort police estimated that approximately 80% of the victims were asked in 2012 and that some 50% of them declined. In other words, PVC obtained contact details for only four out of every ten women who had filed a report to the police during the year.

Thus, the social workers at the Karin Project are in touch with a considerably larger percentage of women for whom a police report has been received than their colleagues at PVC. Nevertheless, they spend quite a bit of time trying to reach women who subsequently do not want to have any contact with them. Social workers at the Karin Project have counselling sessions with approximately 30% of the women whose contact details they receive, whereas social workers at PVC have sessions with some 60% of the women.

Many female victims of partner violence need various kinds of support. Brå's study assigns such support to one of three categories: emotional (counselling), practical (help in communicating with other organizations and public authorities) and material (interventions by the Social Services based on public assistance). Both the Karin Project and PVC provide emotional and practical support but are not authorized to offer financial assistance or other material support. Such decisions are made by the municipal social services.

The content of counselling sessions at the Karin Project and PVC also appear to be quite similar. Information, motivation and sup-

port are the key elements. The social services at neither Project Karin nor PVC keep particularly advanced statistics about their encounters with victims or subsequent interventions.

The Karin Project does not increase the percentage of women that participate in the investigations

FPV in Västerås also specializes in helping victims of partner violence. However, there are population differences between the areas that Project Karin and PRV cover. Malmö is a much bigger city than Västerås with different demographics and social challenges. The material that Brå studied suggests that the circumstances surrounding partner violence are often the same in the two cities. The biggest difference is that Västerås has a smaller percentage of plaintiffs and suspects with a non-Swedish ethnic background, a larger percentage of them are under the influence of drugs or alcohol when the offence is perpetrated, and the police report is more likely to be filed when the situation is acute.

The material examined by Brå indicates that the police at the Karin Project had interrogated nine out of ten victims but only two-thirds of suspects and witnesses. The injuries sustained by the victims are normally documented by a combination of words and images. Videotaping the injuries, documenting the scene of the offence, searching the premises and confiscating evidence are uncommon. Forty per cent of the suspects are placed in detention or custody. The average processing period for cases investigated at the Karin Project is four and a half months.

Police investigations at FPV are largely similar to those at the Karin Project. But the differences revealed by the material favour FPV: preliminary investigation interrogations are held earlier, more witnesses are interrogated and processing periods average 70 rather than 139 days. However, there are no apparent differences when it comes to the number of victims who agree to participate in investigations (one goal of the Karin Project).

One vital ingredient in building a case for prosecution is that the victim is prepared to take part in the investigation. The chances are much smaller if she declines to participate. When the Karin Project was first designed, great faith was placed in the belief that a suitable setting, a focus on considerate and respectful treatment, and an offer of help and assistance would give more women the courage and desire to take part in the investigation. Nevertheless, Brå's review of the police investigations found that 60% of the victims participated at both Project Karin and PRV. Given that the material does not show any correlation between ethnic background and participation in either Malmö or Västerås, the fact that Project Karin includes more women with foreign backgrounds has no impact on these results.

The percentage of cases that reached the prosecutor in Malmö was low but increased in 2012

The material that Brå examined revealed that 30% of cases at the Karin Project, and 29% of those at PRV, generated preliminary investigation reports that were sent to the prosecutor. 23% of Project Karin's cases and 25% of PRV's cases led to conviction. Thus, there were no significant differences in the results of the two partner violence units at the time of the study. Moreover, the figures were relatively low compared to the rest of Sweden during that period.

Polisens utredningar av våld mot kvinnor i nära relationer (Police Investigations of Partner Violence against Women) (2008:25) found that the percentage of cases per authority that led to conviction is clearly correlated with four specific criteria: the existence of a witness who can verify the victim's story, a plaintiff who participates in the investigation, documented injuries and at least partial confession by the suspect. The cases taken on by the Karin Project were less likely to meet the above criteria than those investigated by the police authorities included in the previous study. The fact that fewer cases at the Karin Project led to convictions than those handled by the police in Västerås and the country as a whole is probably due in part to this dynamic.

An additional reason that more cases did not lead to convictions is that such a large percentage of the victims had foreign backgrounds. The previous study (Brå 2008:25) also concluded that a conviction was less likely when the plaintiff had a non-Swedish ethnic background. The same is true in the material that Brå examined from the Karin Project and FPV. Even when all four criteria are met, it is more difficult to convict the perpetrator if the plaintiff has a foreign background. Analyzing the possible reasons for this particular correlation, however, was beyond the scope of this study.

The proportion of Karin Project cases reported to the prosecutor increased significantly in 2012 (from 29% to 36%). Of relevance may be the fact that the project had engaged an additional supervisor and had improved their human resources since 2010-2011. The police and social workers say that they have put together an effective organization, which has set the stage for better results.

New cooperative arrangements elemental to the Karin project

Collaboration is a cornerstone of the Karin Project. The staff cooperates with a number of organizations, both on general issues and individual cases. The social workers at the Karin Project have most contact with the police at the station, as well as the social services

offices at the various district administrations of Malmö. In addition to the two social workers at the Karin Project, the police have most contact with the prosecutors, with whom they get together almost every day at the station.

The staff at the Karin Project collaborate more often, both with each other and with external organizations, than the staff at PVC and FPV do. They have more frequent contact with other organizations and authorities when it comes to both individual cases and general issues surrounding the effort to help victims of partner violence.

However, Brå found no differences in how well the various collaborative efforts work. Everyone at Project Karin, FPV and PVC feels that the cooperative arrangements they have made with external organizations are working well and are important in assisting female victims of partner violence.

Victims have shown their appreciation for the activities of the Karin Project

Interviews with women who have been in touch with the Karin Project indicated that they are very grateful, particularly for the physical environment. The security and coziness of the premises have done a great deal for both women and children, as well as helping them cope with the situation in which they find themselves.

Most of the interviewees had been contacted by the social workers at the Karin Project and were highly appreciative. Even the victims who did not believe they needed help or support, or who received only brief counselling, felt that way. Many of the women wished that they could have obtained more help from the Karin Project or other organizations than they did. The victims who were most satisfied were those who had maintained extended contact with the social workers at the Karin Project.

Women were very pleased with the respect and consideration with which the police had treated them. They described the police as kind, pleasant, understanding, helpful, reassuring and informative. They also stated that they had received useful information about the investigations. However, they were not as satisfied with the manner in which the investigations had been conducted. They observed that the investigations took too long, that the police were overly passive at times, that certain skills were lacking and that staff turnover was high.

At the time of the interviews, which were conducted at various intervals after the original police report had been filed, some of the women had been threatened and harassed by the perpetrator and a couple of them had reported it to the police. The great majority of women who had not suffered further abuse said that they would

report it to the police if it recurred. Some of them stated that the help they had received at Project Karin made them willing to file a new report if necessary. Nevertheless, the victims were still largely traumatized by the violence to which they had been subjected.

Conclusions

- Outreach and support are valuable tools for helping female victims of partner violence who have filed a report to the police.
- Collaboration with the police sets the stage for the social services to contact victims and offer support.
- Situating the police and social services in the same premises makes it easier to conduct outreach. The opportunities for close cooperation that emerge also enable routines that ensure ongoing assessment of the risk that victims will continue to be subjected to violence. Outreach can be expanded, however, even when the police and social services cannot share physical facilities.
- The social services need to cultivate the kind of skills and organization that, in addition to initial support, can provide help based on a decision to offer public assistance.
- Adapting the Karin Project premises to the needs of the plaintiffs and their children has a major impact on their perception of the investigation process. Other police stations around the country, particularly those that specialize in partner violence, would do well to discuss ways of improving their environments to better address the needs of victims. Other types of crime victims may also benefit when non-specialist units institute such changes.
- Nevertheless, expecting that supportive premises and treatment will cause many more women to participate in criminal investigations does not appear to be reasonable.
- Prioritize and organize police work in order to maximize the success factors that are particularly important in convicting perpetrators of partner violence.
- It is important the police continue to focus on having sufficient personnel with the skills and commitment that investigations of partner violence require.
- Efficient routines and systems for statistical monitoring are vital for both the social services and the police in order to quality assure, follow up and improve efforts aimed at helping victims of partner violence.